DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 100 JC 000 060

AUTHOR	Robles, Harriett J.
TITLE	The Learning College--An Oxymoron?
PUB DATE	1999-11-00
NOTE	18p.; Presented at Community College League of California Conference (Burlingame, CA, November 20, 1999).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrators; College Faculty; *Community Colleges; Educational Change; *Educational Objectives; *Human Resources; *Institutional Mission; Learning; *Outcome Based Education; *Staff Development; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*California Community Colleges

ABSTRACT

One of the current trends in California community colleges is an increased emphasis on learning. This study focuses on personnel at colleges that have embraced the goal of becoming learning-centered institutions and poses the question: How are faculty, staff, and administrators prepared to achieve this goal? The study included a review of the mission statements and human resource development plans of 106 colleges, six of which were selected for qualitative case studies. Forty interviews were conducted with college personnel. Questions included: (1) How has the college defined the concept or goal of a learning college? (2) What activities has the college undertaken to achieve this goal? (3) What are the skills faculty and staff need to reach this goal? (4) What activities have been provided to prepare personnel to be members of a learning college? Major findings include: (1) colleges believe that the principal goal is success in student learning; (2) colleges appear to be shifting from the instructional to the learning paradigm; (3) colleges are excellent incubators for personal mastery; (4) colleges are well positioned to develop learning organization skills; and (5) lack of mechanisms to provide reinforcing feedback is the weakest link for colleges attempting to become more learning-centered. The author makes eight recommendations for becoming a learning-centered college. (Contains 31 references.) (RDG)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robles, Harriet
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

ED 437 100

The Learning College - An Oxymoron?

Harriett J. Robles, Ed.D.
Dean of Instruction & Matriculation
West Valley College
Saratoga, CA

Community College League of California
Burlingame, CA
November 20, 1999

JC 000 060

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Building Learning Colleges: Preparing Community College Faculty and Staff

By

Harriett J. Robles

One of the current trends in California community colleges is an increased emphasis on learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995; O'Banion, 1997b). Over one third of California community colleges state that being a learning-centered college is part of their mission, vision, or goals. This study asks the question: For those California community colleges that have embraced the goal of becoming learning-centered institutions, how are their faculty, staff, and administrators prepared to achieve this goal?

The research included a review of the mission statements and of the current human resource development plans of 106 California community colleges. Six colleges were selected for qualitative case studies. Forty structured interviews were conducted with administrators, faculty, and staff. Questions included: (1) How has the college defined the concept or goal of a learning college? (2) What activities has the college undertaken to achieve this goal? (3) What are the skills faculty and staff need in order to achieve this goal? (4) What activities have been provided to specifically prepare faculty, staff, and administrators to be members of a learning college?

The findings were discussed within the context of Senge's (1990) learning organization model. They showed that (1) to a high degree, colleges concur that their principal goal is student success in the form of student learning; (2) despite skepticism, most community colleges appear to be shifting from the instructional to the learning paradigm; (3) community colleges are excellent incubators for personal mastery; (4) by virtue of shared governance and a trend toward interdisciplinarity, community colleges are well positioned to develop learning organization skills; (5) Lack of mechanisms to provide reinforcing feedback is the weakest link for colleges attempting to become learning-centered.

This study makes eight recommendations for becoming a learning-centered college: (1) define terms; (2) know the campus cultures; (3) make the learning needs of the organization as important and as explicit as the learning needs of students; (4) make professional development an integral part of institutional planning; (5) specify organizational skills in job announcements; (6) support professional development; (7) develop feedback mechanisms; (8) think of all employees as learners.

Definitions of Learning Community, Learning Organization, and Learning College

Learning community	"A curricular intervention designed to enhance collaboration and expand learning. . . [and which] purposefully restructures the curriculum to link together courses or course work so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning, as well as increased intellectual interaction with faculty and students."
Learning organization	One in which "people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together." O'Banion (1996) bases his definition on that of Senge (1990, p. 3) and notes, "In some ways, a learning organization is designed for the staff of the institution, while a learning-centered institution is designed for the students."
Learning college	A term which "is much more useful in describing the comprehensive nature of a community college committed to placing learning first than are the terms *learning communities* and *learning organizations*. The learning college places learning first and provides educational experiences for learners any way, any place, any time."

From "Learning Communities, Learning Organizations, and Learning Colleges" (pp.1-2), by T. O'Banion, 1996, Leadership Abstracts, 9(8).

Systems Thinking

Performance models developed primarily for the corporate world found their way into academe during the 1980s and 1990s. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. They include the shift from a local to a global economy, heightened expectations in a period of limited resources, and increasing demand for accountability. There has also been more dialogue between business and higher education about students' lack of skills necessary to work in a new and continually changing environment. This collaboration was documented in a 1989 national report, *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000,* issued by the U.S. Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills.

Two examples of corporate performance models which higher education considered were Total Quality Management (TQM) and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). These are management approaches and organizational paradigms adopted by businesses in reaction to increasing international competition, especially from Japan. Their origins lie in the organizations of mass production that burgeoned after World War II. They share the same principles: a workplace of continuous improvement, client-centeredness, use of measurement and benchmarking for decision-making, teamwork, and individual empowerment (Peterson et al., 1997, p. 15). Perhaps the only major difference between the two is the terminology. *Management* suggests that the

principles are focused on managers. Moreover, the term implies an action that is done to someone or something, an unpopular concept in higher education. The most notable of the TQM proponents are Deming (1982), who developed 14 points for improving quality and productivity in the manufacturing sector, and Juran (1964), who emphasized the importance of the user's needs and expectations. These points were also applied to the service sector (Crosby, 1979) and eventually to education (Cornesky et al., 1992; Seymour, 1991).

Just as education had adopted the "cult of efficiency" or the factory model from the business world in the early 1900s, so did it eventually consider the concepts of TQM (Cornesky et al., 1992). Some community colleges embraced the movement, forming The Continuous Quality Improvement Network, a group of community colleges which led the transformation. In 1995, the Baldridge National Quality Award was extended to education, using the same framework as the one designed for business but with a focus on learning-centered education (Wolverton, 1994, p. 14).

The transformation has had limited impact, however, with some effect on management structures within the colleges and relatively little effect on the learning process (O'Banion, 1997b, p. 98). The adoption of business concepts and terminology has not been widely embraced by faculty, especially the concept of student as customer. Faculty perceive the learning process to be something more than a business transaction. Mellow (1996) referred to the relationship between higher education and TQM as a "flirtation. . . TQM might be seen as the last best attempt of the late Industrial Era to build effective organizations" (Mellow, 1996, p. 8). For these reasons, and because many colleges only partially understood the concepts of TQM and only partially implemented it, the TQM movement has not changed fundamental practices and beliefs in spite of the many similarities between TQM and learning organizations (O'Banion, 1997b, p. 98). Even so, there is little doubt that the TQM movement reinforced the expectation that colleges engage in a continuous process of evaluation and adjustment.

As with the learning paradigm, TQM terminology is loaded for faculty (Hodges & Milliron, 1997, p. 1), who resist thinking of students as "customers" or the learning process as a business transaction for which "satisfaction" is a measure of success. "Students can be very satisfied and poorly served. By the same token, they can be dissatisfied even though they were well served" (L. Schreibstein, personal communication, 1998). More acceptable was the concept that students were indeed customers at specific points in the educational process, for example, registration. Also acceptable was the concept of internal customers, for example, college faculty and staff as customers of district services such as facilities and computer services.

One difficulty with the TQM movement may well have been its emphasis on management. Traditionally, faculty in higher education have been suspicious of those who enter the administrative ranks, and like many professionals, they are adverse to the concept of being managed. Also, administrative roles in higher education are often poorly defined, amounting to a few clear responsibilities and numerous "other duties as assigned." Within short order, job descriptions and actual duties bear little resemblance to one another. Thus, the attention focused on management and its role in assuring quality, especially in the classroom, was one that did not sit well with either faculty or administration. This was especially the case because colleges were not structured to implement many of the TQM tenets, particularly in terms of systematic assessment and

evaluation. "By 1994, it became apparent that the TQM process had become bureaucratized and incapable of fast, responsive innovation. The college leadership looked for a new model. . . and found their answer in Senge's less structured concept of a learning organization" (Kozeracki, 1998, p. 3).

The learning organization model that has had the most impact on education appears to be based on Peter Senge's five disciplines (1990) that form the foundation for his concept of a learning organization. Senge described a learning organization as "a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. And how they can change it" (Senge, 1990, p. 13). He identified five disciplines that must be addressed if organizational learning is to lead to organizational change. These are personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking.

Senge's ideas on systems are the product of decades of systems thinking and research. Capra (1996, p. 36) noted that most of the key criteria of systems thinking were in place by the 1930s as the result of work in the fields of biology, psychology, and ecology. The concepts that were formed then were later reinforced by discoveries made in quantum physics.

Systems thinking is first characterized by a shift in focus from the parts to the whole: "Living systems are integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller parts" (Capra, 1996, p. 36). Second, systems have different levels, that is, systems within other systems, and each is unique in its design and complexity. This shift is a fundamental reversal of the Cartesian notion that the behavior of an entire system could be analyzed by studying its parts. Eventually, quantum physics would show that there are no parts at all but what Capra called "merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships" (Capra, 1996, p. 37). For systems thinkers, these relationships or networks are of primary importance. Thus, a third characteristic of systems thinking is the metaphor of the network, replacing the older image of knowledge as a building of static foundations and rooms.

Scientific knowledge from the viewpoint of systems thinkers is in constant motion. Physics, long considered the foundation of science, is no more or less important than any other branch of science, for example, biology. This view calls into question the belief that scientific descriptions can be objective. The method of questioning, the epistemology, becomes central to any theories that are developed. As Capra noted, if all is interconnected and no concept or model is any more fundamental than another, then how can we ever understand anything? If everything is connected to everything else, then "in order to explain any one of them, we need to understand all the others, which is obviously impossible" (Capra, 1996, p. 41). The solution lies in an acceptance of a new paradigm that knowledge is always limited and approximate.

> What makes it possible to turn the systems approach into a science is the discovery that there is approximate knowledge. This insight is crucial to all of modern science. The old paradigm is based on the Cartesian belief in the certainty of scientific knowledge. In the new paradigm it is recognized that all scientific concepts and theories are limited and approximate. Science can never provide any complete and definitive understanding. (Capra, 1996, p. 41)

A final point is that all these characteristics are combined in a thought process that is described as both contextual and process oriented. As Capra noted, "In systems science every structure is seen as the manifestation of underlying processes. Systems thinking is always process thinking" (Capra, 1996, p 42). These elements form the foundation for the work of theorists such as Hardin (1961), Forrester (1969), and Kauffman (1980), from whom Senge acknowledged he culled his five disciplines (Senge, 1990, p. 394). In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge defined learning organizations as those which constantly recreate themselves.

As Senge has noted, however, awareness alone is not sufficient to make substantive change. Organizations must master and employ specific skills and attitudes to think and act systemically. He identified five disciplines that must all be mastered if an organization is to truly "learn" and achieve the ability to continually enhance its capacity and to recreate itself. These five disciplines, or "component technologies," are systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning. Systems thinking, the fifth discipline and the one which integrates the others, has been outlined above. The other four disciplines are briefly defined as follows:

Personal mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively. It is the "spiritual foundation" of a learning organization (Senge, 1990, p.7). Senge noted that personal mastery is important because it involves the reciprocal commitments between an individual and the organization, and between individual learning and organizational learning.

Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Mental models are important to identify and scrutinize in order to "balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others" (Senge, 1990, p. 9). Without such awareness, said Senge, learning cannot take place.

Building shared vision is the process of binding people together around a common identity and a sense of destiny. Senge distinguished genuine vision from a vision statement that too often results in compliance rather than commitment.

Team learning, the final discipline, is vital because teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations. For Senge, the discipline of team learning begins with dialogue from the Greek *dia-logos*, which means a free-flowing of thinking through a group.

Senge noted that to practice these disciplines is as much a personal endeavor as an organizational one, that people have to be lifelong learners because the essence of a learning organization is that one never "arrives." "You can never say, 'We are a learning organization,' any more than you can say, 'I am an enlightened person'. . . As the disciplines converge, they do not produce a final product but "a new wave of experimentation and advancement" (Senge, 1990, p. 11).

The concept of life-long or continual learning is fundamental to the essence of a learning organization. From Senge's point of view, the most accurate term for what takes place in a learning organization is another Greek word, *meta-noia*, which means a shift of mind. "To grasp the meaning of 'metanoia' is to grasp the deeper meaning of 'learning,'

for learning also involves a fundamental shift or movement of mind" (Senge, 1990, p. 13). Learning is not merely absorbing information.

> This, then, is the basic meaning of a "learning organization" – an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future . . . "adaptive (survival) learning" is important – indeed it is necessary. But for a learning organization, "adaptive learning" must be joined by "generative learning," learning that enhances our capacity to create. (Senge, 1990, p. 14)

What does it mean when a learning institution commits to becoming a learning organization? In a 1995 interview on schools as learning organizations, Senge discussed the application of his principles to education, beginning with the assertion that institutions of learning are not automatically learning organizations (O'Neil, 1995). For Senge, most adult learning, for example, staff development programs, focuses on the individual. Staff development programs do not necessarily enhance the organization's collective capacity to create and pursue a vision. While conferences may be of value, in Senge's opinion, real learning can only take place on the job, "in the context where [the teacher is] taking action" (O'Neil, 1995). Even so, schools are not typically organized to support collective learning. They are complex and very stratified organizations embedded within even more complex communities. Knowledge is fragmented into very specialized areas, and teaching is a highly individual activity. Educators are likely to feel disempowered, not having sufficient leverage to make change in such a complex system.

Nonetheless, Senge believed education has at least one asset upon which it can successfully capitalize. Its employees tend to have a "sense of personal purpose and deep caring" (O'Neil, 1995). The difficulty lies in taking advantage of this commitment. Senge suggested two possibilities. One is to create an environment in which educators can reflect. A second way is to bring educators together so that their "individual visions can start to interact" and create a "field of shared meaning" (O'Neil, 1995). He cautioned that this is a long process, not an event, and yet that is how learning activities for staff are usually constructed and presented – in sporadic and disconnected retreats and workshops. "We fail to capture the imagination and commitment of the [faculty] learner in the way any real learning process must" (O'Neil, 1995).

While Senge asserted that there is nothing in any of the five disciplines that would make them inherently less suitable for education than business, he acknowledged some validity to educators' skepticism about the application of business concepts and terminology to education. From Senge's perspective, because of its multiple constituencies and because its product is human beings capable of lifelong learning, education presents a greater challenge than business in terms of innovation. However, he observed:

> You can make pretty compelling arguments that systems thinking, building a shared vision, dialogue, and learning how to reflect on our mental models are, at some level, educational undertakings more than business undertakings. (O'Neil, 1995)

Moving from Senge's concept of a learning organization to O'Banion's concept of a learning college, O'Banion identified six key principles upon which such an organization is based. Note that he used the more inclusive term "learners," not "students." These six principles form the core of the learning college.

Principles of the Learning College

1. The learning college creates substantive change in individual learners.

2. The learning college engages learners in the learning process as full partners, assuming primary responsibility for their own choices.

3. The learning college creates and offers as many options for learning as possible.

4. The learning college assists learners to form and participate in collaborative learning activities.

5. The learning college defines the roles of learning facilitators by the needs of the learners.

6. The learning college and its learning facilitators succeed only when improved and expanded learning can be documented for its learners.

From Creating More Learning-Centered Community Colleges (p. 20), by T. O'Banion, 1997a, The League for Innovation in the Community College.

O'Banion acknowledged that among the challenges of creating a learning-centered college is that such an entity is often confused with a learning organization. There is a difference. He noted, "In some ways a learning organization is designed for the staff of the institution, while a learning-centered institution is designed for the students" (O'Banion, 1997a, p. 26). A learning organization will not necessarily produce a learning-centered institution, but according to O'Banion, the concepts of a learning organization provide "a powerful foundation on which to build a learning-centered institution" (O'Banion, 1997a, p. 26).

Conclusions

Building a Shared Vision

When one analyzes community colleges in respect to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, one of the system's major strengths is its shared vision. To a person, those interviewed for this study were very clear about what they believed the

colleges' mission is: student success. Responses were consistent, whether the person was chancellor of the entire community college system, administrator, instructor, or classified staff member. It is not clear whether the process of creating a vision and/or mission statement by these colleges was the reason for such a high level of agreement. Many faculty objected to the notion that focusing on learning is a new concept and as discussed in previous chapters, faculty were easily alienated by the jargon associated with the learning revolution and with the corporate world. Many administrators concurred that in order to build the vision, it is necessary to avoid using many of the terms which have negative connotations for faculty. Nonetheless, as the interviews progressed, it became apparent that student success, in the form of student learning, was a commonly held goal. Each college, however, had different ideas as to how it could best achieve that goal, and those ideas both reflected and were shaped by the college's own culture. Thus, the issue was not so much the vision as it was the means by which the vision could be reached. Determining where they wanted to be and what they wanted to be in the future was not the difficult part for colleges; it was the how. As community colleges engage in the visioning process, it seems critical to make this distinction early or colleges can spend a great deal of time and energy and not deal directly with those issues that are the true obstacles to progress.

Although the apparent presence of a strongly shared vision should be considered a major strength, it can be weakened, even die, if organizations are not able to maintain what Senge referred to as "creative tension," the tension between the vision and reality. There are other threats, or limiting forces as Senge called them, including dissipation of focus, lack of time, energy, and systemic thinking skills. These limiting forces are prevalent in community colleges and were much on the minds of management. More than one chief executive officer indicated that in order to support change, a fundamental restructuring of their organizations, in fact, the entire state system, would be necessary.

Mental Models

Within the community college environment, *paradigm* is the term that is used in place of mental models. Most community colleges appeared to be seriously considering the positive and the negative implications of shifting from one mental model to another. Perhaps in this case, the process is at least as important as the product. Whether a given mental model prevails may or may not have significant, long-term impact. What may have significant and long-term impact is participants learning not only that mental models exist, but how to expose them in such a way that decision-making processes are actually made better.

To a great extent, community colleges were aware of the need to recognize and manage mental models more effectively, although they did not typically use Senge's terms to express it. Rather, it was expressed as a set of organizational skills, the most frequently mentioned of which was the ability to be open-minded. There are two aspects to this skill, two sides of the same coin. One is the need to be open to the mental models of others. The other is to be aware of one's own mental models. Community colleges are not without resources to identify and examine the different assumptions which members of the college community bring to the decision-making process. The most prominent tool is shared governance; the most useful trend is the movement toward

interdisciplinary studies. Learning to balance inquiry and advocacy in the shared governance process involves the same kind of open thinking that allows faculty to operate outside the disciplinary boxes and to take advantage of the different perspectives and problem-solving tools which other disciplines have to offer. In both cases – shared governance and interdisciplinary thinking – the results can generally be expected to be greater than the sum of the parts and lead to new and improved ways of achieving institutional goals.

Personal Mastery

Personal mastery is based on two processes: (a) continually clarifying what is important; (b) continually learning how to see current reality more clearly. It is the difference between current reality (what is) and vision (what we want) or what Senge called "creative tension." The purpose of personal mastery is learning how to generate and sustain creative tension (Senge, 1990, pp. 141-142). If the results of the six case studies conducted for this dissertation are representative, community colleges are excellent incubators for personal mastery or proficiency, given the strength of their shared vision. Based on the information collected during the case studies, one conclusion is that the relationship between community colleges and their employees is more covenantal than contractual, thus indicating a high degree of reciprocal commitment between the college and its members. Again, this is a powerful foundation for building an organization capable of achieving its goals.

However, there are weaknesses, primary of which is the need for accurate information to both establish credibility and support decision-making. Colleges have the same need for accurate information as any other complex organization, but colleges are less adept at accessing the information they do have, finding ways of ensuring that it is used in decision-making, and most critical, evaluating and learning from the outcomes. Consistently, managers interviewed for this study acknowledged their weaknesses in this area, especially in terms of reinforcing feedback. No college appeared to be satisfied with its feedback mechanisms, if they even existed.

Achieving personal mastery also depends on strong leadership to support it, and herein lies another threat for community colleges. Strong leadership is not lacking but stability is. California chief executive officers have a turnover rate (4.4 years) significantly higher than that of their counterparts nationwide (7.5-7.8 years) (Community College League of California, 1998). Changes in leadership are exacerbated if the college does not have systems in place that guarantee institutional priorities are maintained even if the leadership changes. O'Banion (1994) argued for the development of a "critical core" of faculty who can engage in innovation. "[That way] the college can survive changes in presidents" (O'Banion, 1994, p. 1). This is not to suggest that priorities might not need to be reexamined, but it is difficult for faculty, staff, and administrators to sustain a sense of progress when the course of the college can dramatically shift every 3 years. Part of this problem lies in the nature of learning wherein there is often considerable delay between the learning experience and the learning outcome. If no formal feedback mechanisms are in place, much of the learning and thus the sense of accomplishment can be lost.

Team Learning

Senge defined team learning as "the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 1990, p. 236). It builds on the disciplines of shared vision and personal mastery. The concept of alignment is fundamental to team learning. Alignment is "when a group of people function as a whole" (Senge, 1990, p. 234).

Chief among the skills mentioned by interviewees as most important in reaching the organizational mission was the ability to work in teams. Community colleges are well positioned to provide an environment in which team learning skills can be developed. Not only does the shared governance model support team learning, but recent trends in curriculum design emphasizing interdisciplinary studies require more interaction among faculty in different disciplines. Another reinforcement for team learning skills among faculty and staff is the current expectation, based on research in cognitive and adult learning theory, that classroom activities will be more participatory, interactive, and collaborative. Team approaches to problem-solving are emphasized. Faculty who acquire the skills to design such learning experiences and implement them in their classrooms may well come to expect the same skills to be employed at the organizational level.

The threat for community colleges is that insufficient time is made available to support team building. It has been noted that shared governance is not especially efficient, though there are those who argue that the time spent up front to reach a decision is time that does not have to be spent down the line to make corrections. Also, working in teams, especially interdisciplinary teams, poses significant challenges in community colleges, where the teaching load is heaviest of the three segments of higher education. Like their counterparts in the university and state college systems, community colleges operate within the constraints created by traditional discipline structures that encourage vertical stovepipe and silo thinking and discourage cross- and inter-disciplinary efforts. The success of teams within the community colleges is largely dependent upon the support provided by the college, which is itself a reflection of how much the college values such efforts. That support is most evident when colleges ensure that faculty and staff have sufficient time to acquire team building skills and to engage in team activities.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is what Senge proposed to replace the illusion that "the world is created of separate, unrelated forces" (Senge, 1990, p 3). Systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge, and a set of tools which help to identify the patterns within and between individual systems.

As noted above, feedback, especially reinforcing feedback, was the weak link for colleges attempting to become learning-centered. It appeared as though most had little idea how to establish viable feedback mechanisms. Thus, they tended to focus on perfecting other mechanisms with which they were more familiar and over which they had relatively more control, such as shared governance or data collection and storage

systems. However, one staff member observed that there was no value in strengthening the already strong links of a chain; a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Community colleges are highly complex organizations. Learning is at the heart of what they do, and there is evidence that considerable experimentation and innovation take place daily within and outside the classroom. In most cases, it appeared that colleges had little or no effective means of capturing the nature and scope of these changes, much less measuring the outcomes. As was noted by one institutional researcher, even the outcomes measures established by the state's Partnership for Excellence program will not measure learning, only the proxies for learning, such as transfer rates. To truly measure learning requires pre- and post-assessment and evaluation. For an organization, that means consistent, ongoing assessment and evaluation of those activities that it has decided are true indicators of performance. The dilemma is that so much is taking place at so many institutional levels at one time.

Part of the answer lies in establishing meaningful and reliable performance indicators and then setting priorities so that the college can reasonably track them. Another part of the answer lies in expanding the kinds of measures that are used. For example, Partnership for Excellence is based on quantitative measures, such as transfer rates and course completions. Those measures are relatively easy to fulfill, relying as they do on data that all colleges collect. However, they may not be the right indicators to measure learning. More qualitative measures might be more appropriate. In particular, portfolio assessment holds great promise for measuring learning, not only for students but for employees and organizations, as well. Portfolio assessment, discussed below, provides for the key component of learning: reflection. It may also be a means of measuring the strength of both the individual's and the institution's growth in terms of the five disciplines.

The answer to the question posed by this study has many aspects. Eventually one must combine those aspects and plot the result on a yes/no continuum. My answer to the first part of the question – are colleges preparing their staff – is more yes than no. In fact, examination of professional development programs and interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators revealed that a great deal of preparation was taking place – more than could be accounted for. Colleges were using a variety of approaches, usually through professional development, to provide opportunities for staff to acquire organizational skills.

However, there is one significant fact that must be considered. Most colleges consciously and unconsciously did not call these activities what they were, that is, activities to create a learning organization. Thus, if one were to ask the question without probing further, it might appear that little in the way of the development of learning organization skills was occurring because colleges typically did not use those terms or think of themselves as learning organizations. One of the recommendations of this study, discussed below, addresses the need for colleges to make more explicit their attempts to develop the organizational skills of employees.

Recommendations

Based on the information collected in the course of this study, there are eight recommendations for colleges who have committed to or want to commit to becoming learning-centered institutions.

Define terms.

As this study has shown, defining terms and therefore concepts, is critical. A *learning college* and a *learning organization* are not the same thing, and both are different from a *learning community*, if one uses O'Banion's definitions. A college can be a learning college without being a learning organization, but the findings of this study strongly support an explicit commitment to becoming a learning organization, as well. Part of defining terms involves becoming educated about the available options and understanding whether and how they fit with all the college's goals.

Know the cultures.

There are multiple cultures at work in a community college: the culture of higher education, the culture of the individual college, the culture of different constituency groups (students, faculty, staff, administrators) within the college, the cultures of different disciplines, and the cultures of individuals, to name a few. Resnick and Hall's (1998) model of nested learning communities is helpful in visualizing the interrelationship of college groups in a learning context.

Understanding these cultures and their interplay is critical to the success of any significant change. This study has revealed that it is all too easy for college administration to attempt to introduce new ideas without considering the assumptions held by the various constituencies and without making sure to present the ideas in such a way that they will not be rejected out of hand. One specific recommendation is to invite proponents of new ideas to present them in a panel discussion so that faculty and staff do not feel that any single point of view is one they are expected to adopt. Another recommendation is to identify and resolve any conflicts regarding roles of faculty, staff, and administrators in the learning process. These assumptions, or mental models, must be acknowledged and addressed if the college is to work as a team. Finally, avoid the either-or dilemma. Too frequently, the issues are narrowed to two options. For example, many faculty, staff, and administrators perceive that colleges can be either teaching-centered or learning-centered, but not both. "Whipped from one side to another, we fail to find a synthesis that might embrace the best of both approaches" (Palmer, 1997, p. 5).

Make the learning needs of the organization as important and as explicit as the learning needs of students.

In a learning-centered college, everyone is a learner, and there are multiple levels of learning: individual, departmental, divisional, and institutional. Learning at all levels must be purposeful, which means that it must be explicit, it must be useful, and it must be assessed. The strength of community colleges – their shared vision of student success – can also be a weakness if the organization does not value its own success. Consider the safety instructions given by the flight attendant prior to take-off. If there is a sudden change in pressure, adults should put on their oxygen masks first and then assist their

children. Similarly, organizations must ensure their well-being first if they are to assume responsibility for that of their students.

Make professional development an integral part of institutional planning.

Professional development in the California community colleges tends to be treated as an optional activity, regardless of legislative mandate. Within the programs themselves, most colleges have a mix of required and self-selected activities, but self-selection prevails. If colleges wish to strengthen organizational skills, then those must be identified and all employees should be expected to acquire them, though there can be options as to the means by which they are acquired. In addition, an assessment and evaluation component needs to be established so that the college can measure whether a given activity was effective. In those cases where professional development funds are used primarily to support traditional activities, such as conference attendance, colleges should ensure that participants have a means of feeding back their experiences into the system.

Specify organizational skills in job announcements.

When it comes to organizational skills, such as the ability to work in teams, all the colleges in this study indicated that they look for those skills in second-level interviews, especially in the case of faculty. Except for boiler-plate language about working with diverse groups, no college in the study specified in the job announcements the organizational skills that they expected applicants to possess. If these skills are critical to the success of the organization, then colleges should consider making them known at the point of application.

Support professional development.

As community colleges undergo the transformation from teaching- to learning-centered institutions (O'Banion,1997b) and from an individual to a systems-level of analysis (Oromaner, 1997), one might expect an increasing recognition of the necessity for comprehensive faculty and staff development programs (Oromaner, 1998, p. 1). At least two studies, one by the Commission on Innovation (1993) and one by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (1999), stress the need for in-depth, systemwide professional development. There are several aspects to this recommendation. One is integrating professional development into the planning processes, as discussed above. As some colleges indicated, this may involve reorganizing their administrative structures. There is no single organizational model for professional development that fits all colleges, since each college's culture is unique.

Another aspect is ensuring that the coordinator has sufficient time and training to assess individual and institutional needs, plan, implement, and evaluate. Coordinators appeared to be assigned by default rather than design, but they also appeared to be among some of the college's best and brightest staff. All knew that there is much to be learned in the field of human resource development but expressed frustration in having little or no opportunity to acquire that knowledge and skills.

It is not only the coordinators that need time. Time is also an issue for participants. Few would argue that the average community college teaching schedule or

administrative work week permits little time for the kind of experience, practice, and reflection that lead to learning. Thought should be given to reexamining the most fundamental assumptions about the academic year, for example. If colleges are serious about strengthening the organization, it may be that they will have to reconsider the constraints of the semester system and the typical 10-month faculty contract.

Given the recent infusion of $100 million into the system for Partnership for Excellence, money was seldom mentioned as a problem. Nevertheless, it is still a consideration. As noted in this study, the state allocation for staff development has not increased since it was established over a decade ago. Additional money that has materialized has been targeted toward technology training. Allocation schema used by various colleges can restrict the availability of funds for new activities. As with any activity, colleges and the state should determine what they want professional development to provide and then determine how much additional state and/or local support will be necessary to augment the state allocation.

Develop feedback mechanisms based on continuous assessment and evaluation.

As noted repeatedly in this study, the lack of viable feedback mechanisms was a common problem for colleges, perhaps because they are difficult to design and implement at the classroom and institutional levels. In respect to professional development, there is little in place to strengthen organizational learning, yet learning cannot take place without this component.

One recommendation is to use qualitative as well as quantitative measures to assess individual and organizational learning. Of particular value may be portfolio assessment, which can be used to measure both the progress of learners as well as the performance of faculty and staff. The chief advantage of portfolio assessment is that it requires reflection, a critical component of learning.

Providing time and incentive for reflection is a powerful tool for strengthening a learning organization. Argyris and Schön (1981) described three levels of learning. The simplest and the one that involves no significant change is called single-loop learning. It usually occurs at the operations level. The second level, double-loop learning, leads to significant change in behavior and is fundamental to effecting strategic change. The third level, deutero learning, is that level of learning at which an "organization is able to reflect on its ability to learn and to influence it" (Peterson et al., 1997, p. 346). Reflection is too often perceived as a passive activity and not productive. Systems theorists such as Argyris, Schön, and Senge would argue that reflection is the most active and productive stage of strategic planning. Like any other organization intent on meeting its mission, community colleges need to value this level of learning and create an environment and processes that encourage and support it.

Think of faculty, staff, and administrators as learners.

> Educators are learners. . . . We are learners of our discipline and students of our clientele. (Cranton, 1996, pp. 1,5)

> The teacher-as-learner concept is the centerpiece linking classroom and school improvement. (Fullan, Bennett, & Rolheiser-Bennett, May 1990, p. 15)

All staff development programs are required by AB1725 to conduct needs assessments. A typical needs assessment amounts to a checklist survey distributed to faculty and staff. A kind of one-size-fits-all approach is then used to deliver professional development activities, usually workshops and money for conference attendance. However, what is known about adult development and professional career stages, as well as the bipolar nature of faculty demographics (Schuster & Wheeler, 1990, p. 12), suggests that colleges need to be much more proactive in determining the characteristics of faculty and staff and providing opportunities for activities that are designed to meet their varying needs. A 50-year-old instructor who has been teaching 25 years has different needs and interests than a 25-year-old instructor in her first year of teaching. Likewise, a 40-year-old instructor in only his second or third year of teaching has unique needs. There are also differences in terms of skills training and content development. These factors should be considered in planning meaningful professional development at both the individual and organizational levels.

SELECTED REFERENCES

American Association of State Colleges and Universities. (1999). Facing change: Building the faculty of the future. [On-line] Available: www.aascu.org/fpr.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1981). Organizational learning. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Barr, R., & Tagg, J. (1995). From teaching to learning - a new paradigm for undergraduate education. Change, 27(6).

Capra, F. (1996). The web of life. New York: Anchor Books.

Commission on Innovation to the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges. (1993). Choosing the future: An action agenda for community colleges . Sacramento, CA: Author.

Community College League of California. (1998). First biennial league report on CEO tenure and retention. Mission Viejo, CA: Community College League of California.

Cornesky, R. A., et al. (1992). Using Deming to improve quality in colleges and universities (6 ed.). Madison, WI: Magna Publications.

Cranton, P. (Ed.). (1996). Professional development as transformative learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Crosby, P. (1979). Quality is free. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Deming, W. E. (1982). Out of crisis. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Forrester, J. (1969). Urban dynamics. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Fullan, M. B., Bennett, B. & Rolheiser-Bennett, C. (1990, May). Linking classroom and school improvement. Educational Leadership, pp. 13-19.

Hardin, G. (1961). Nature and man's fate. New York: New American Library.

Hodges, N. L., & Milliron, M. D. (1997). On community college renewal. Leadership Abstracts, 10(1).

Juran, J. (1964). Managerial breakthrough. New York: McGraw-Hill

Kauffman, D., Jr. (1980). Systems 1: An introduction to systems thinking. St. Paul, MN: Future Systems.

Kozeracki, C. (1998). Managing organizational change in the community college. In J. S. Levin (Ed.), Organizational change in the community college: Ripple or a sea change? (Vol. 102, p. 3). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mellow, G. O. (1996, October 24-25). The role of the community college chair in organizational change: Chaos, leadership and the challenge of complexity. Paper presented at the Annual Mid-Atlantic Community College Chair/Dean Conference, Blue Bell, PA

O'Banion, T. (1996). Learning communities, learning organizations, and learning colleges. Leadership Abstracts, 9(8).

O'Banion, T. (1997a). Creating more learning-centered community colleges (monograph). The League for Innovation in the Community College.

O'Banion, T. (1997b). A learning college for the 21st century. Phoenix: Oryx Press.

O'Neil, J. (1995, April). On schools as learning organizations: A conversation with Peter Senge. Educational Leadership, 52(7).

Oromaner, M. (1997). Staff development and organizational change. Paper presented at a meeting of the Rotary Club of Jersey City, 2/13/97. Jersey City, NJ: Hudson County Community College. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service ED 405 917)

Oromaner, M. (1998). Faculty and staff development. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service ED416 941)

Palmer, P. (1997). Teaching and learning in community. About Campus, 2(5), 4-13.

Peterson, M. W., Dill, D., Mets, L., & associates. (1997). Planning and management for a changing environment: A handbook on redesigning postsecondary institutions. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Resnick, L., & Hall, M. W. (1998, Fall). Learning organizations for sustainable education reform. Daedalus, 127(4), 89-119.

Schuster, J. & Wheeler, D. (1990). Enhancing faculty careers: Strategies for development and renewal. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Senge, P. M. (1990). The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization. New York: Currency Doubleday.

Seymour, D. (1991). Total quality management in higher education: A critical assessment. Methuen, MA: GOAL/QPC.

Wolverton, M. (1994). A new alliance: Continuous quality and classroom effectiveness (6). Washington , D.C.: ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 6.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Hutchens, David (1998) Outlearning the Wolves. Pegasus.